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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS FOCUSED ON INSTABILITY IN
RUSSIA'S SOUTH

REF: A. MOSCOW 3089
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 2965

Classified By: Acting Pol. M/C Dave Kostelancik for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. With increasing violence directed against law enforcement in Russia's North Caucasus regions (ref. A), the GOR's intelligence agencies are focusing their counterterrorism efforts on domestic radical movements, although they still have some concerns about international terrorist movements operating in the region. At an October 14 meeting of the interagency National Antiterrorism Committee, FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov made special reference to the increase in terrorist activity in the regions bordering South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and added that the FSB had concerns about underground bandit cells carrying out attacks designed to destabilize the northern Caucasus. Bortnikov did not specify which external terrorist groups played a role in any of the attacks that were carried out or planned. Our MFA counterterrorism contacts downplayed the link between external terrorist groups and instability in Russia's northern Caucasus, and one of Moscow's leading counterterrorism experts told us his FSB sources were paying more attention to domestic insurgents. Bortnikov and other Russian officials have announced plans to increase GOR and multilateral efforts to combat the spread of radical ideology, although existing plans to do so have failed to produce any concrete results. End Summary.

War against Global Terrorism or Internal Insurgencies?

[1](#)2. (C) "Novaya Gazeta" reporter and Editor-in-Chief of the terrorism/intelligence community monitoring site agentura.ru, Andrei Soldatov, told us that, in recent months, the FSB had focused its efforts on combating Russian extremist groups carrying out acts of terrorism in Russia's northern Caucasus region. He claimed the FSB had more pressing concerns about these groups than about global terrorist networks operating in the region, such as al-Qaida, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (on Russia's terrorist list, but not designated by the U.S.). At an October 14 meeting of the National Antiterrorism Committee (NAC), FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov announced that there has been a rise in terrorist threats in the Russian regions bordering South Ossetia and Abkhazia and underground bandit activity designed to destabilize the entire North Caucasus. However, he did not indicate which international terrorist groups were assisting these operations. Included in the FSB's threat assessment were alleged attempts by Chechen terrorist Doku Umarov to bomb the resort cities of Sochi and Anapa. Soldatov dismissed many of Bortnikov's announcements as "pure propaganda," but appeared to support the increased FSB

attention to domestic insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus, particularly in the wake of recent attacks in Ingushetia.

13. (C) At the same time, Soldatov was also concerned about Central Asian groups like the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir inciting nationalist-separatist sentiments in Russia's central Volga region, which includes the predominantly Muslim republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan. He argued that Tatar nationalism, which has historically been insulated from radical Islam, was now being infused with extremist beliefs "from the outside." Although he claimed that groups like the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir were using Russia primarily as a safe haven and not as a battleground, he had particular worries that Hizb-ut-Tahrir operatives, who Russia was releasing from prison, would help Tatar nationalist groups coalesce and strengthen. FSB Director Bortnikov confirmed that in 2008, the GOR disrupted international terrorist cells not only in the Volga region, but also in the Urals and Siberia. Soldatov also postulated that these Central Asian terrorist groups could persuade Central Asian migrant workers in Russia to join their movements, especially as migrant numbers increase and living conditions remain poor.

MFA: Russia More or Less Secure

14. (C) MFA contacts in the Department of New Threats and Challenges, the Russian equivalent of the Department's S/CT, did not connect the crisis in the North Caucasus to international terrorism, and downplayed the severity of the threat posed by terrorist groups operating along Russia's southern border. When asked about Russia's counterterrorism

priorities, New Threats and Challenges Third Secretary Maria Visloguzova told us that Russia considered groups like al-Qaida and the IMU to be threats, "but to a much lesser degree" than, for example, the flow of drugs from Afghanistan into Russia. Visloguzova also argued that, while Russian intelligence agencies monitored the 17 organizations on Russia's official terrorist list, they were not anticipating attacks by them on Russian interests; she even considered some of them "public relations people" (piarshchiki) rather than actual threats. To that end, she downplayed the urgency of the threat posed by WMD terrorism, claiming it was highly unlikely these groups would be able to acquire the material necessary to carry out a WMD attack, and that they lacked the capabilities to construct a weapon. With regard to the northern Caucasus, Visloguzova, like Soldatov, did not overdramatize concerns that international terrorists would exploit instability along the South Ossetian and Abkhazian borders, or that threats would emerge in the aftermath of the Georgia crisis. In her estimation, "the situation in the Caucasus is not connected with terrorism at all." However, she would not address separatist movements in the North Caucasus in any detail, claiming it was not her office's responsibility.

Fighting the Information War

15. (C) On October 14, Bortnikov told the NAC that, in response to the rise in terrorist threats, the GOR would have to participate more actively in the information war to combat the spread of terrorists' ideology. Bortnikov's announcement came on the heels of a draft law introduced in the Duma that would allow authorities to shut down any organization considered to be "extremist" (ref. B). The NAC has a working group that is designed to combat disinformation and radical ideology, and reports to Bortnikov. It is not clear, however, what the working group has accomplished. As Soldatov told us, since the group's formation in 2006, the group has not even had a director. The GOR has also stopped or slowed its participation in other information campaigns, including conferences with journalists to "teach them how to write correctly about terrorism," as Soldatov explained. GOR-sponsored forums and websites, like antiterror.ru, had

their budgets slashed or cut altogether. Even the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization decided not to renew its yearly International Anti-Terrorism Forum. Soldatov alleged that the lack of terrorist attacks on Russian territory over the past year has reduced enthusiasm and momentum for these projects, and probably contributed to the NAC working group's inability to get off the ground.

16. (C) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) also plans to get involved in the information campaign against radical ideology. Last week, Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaliy Churkin, speaking on behalf of the SCO, announced that the organization would create a regional counterterrorism and counternarcotics network in Central Asia to combat threats emanating from Afghanistan. One of the network's top priorities would be to prevent the spread of radical ideology, and would work with member states' governments, civil society, the media, and the private sector to advance this goal. Churkin added that the new SCO counterterrorism institution would work with UN counterterrorism organs to reach an agreement on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Churkin's comment on the UN Convention was unsurprising; our MFA counterterrorism contacts, in particular former New Threats and Challenges Senior Counselor Vladimir Prokhorov (now at Russia's UN Mission), have emphasized the need to reach agreement on the Convention quickly.

Comment

17. (C) In spite of the downplaying of links between foreign and domestic terrorist groups, combating global terrorism remains a serious concern for officials. Cooperation with the U.S. on this issue is cited as one of the most important areas of focus for Russia with the next U.S. administration.
BEYRLE